

JESUS IS ENOUGH!!!

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF COLOSSIANS

Friends Forever

According to Bible.org, a major source of frustration for pastors is what is called the 80-20 rule: Twenty percent of people in the church do 80 percent of the work, while the 80 percent attend church, enjoy the service, and leave without ever getting involved. Consider what it would be like if 80 percent of your physical body was paralyzed. Yes, churches can limp along with only 20 percent of the church body functioning, but we serve best when all members are fully engaged in serving the Lord in line with our God-given spiritual gifts.

Our final passage in our study of Colossians is a text we tend to skim over since it is a bunch of strange sounding names of people who don't mean much to us. You may even wonder why God inspired these verses to be in His Word. There is a reason for everything in scripture! One reason for these names in scripture is because they represent a team of people who were devoted to serving Christ in Paul's day reminding us that is what we should be – a team of folks devoted to serving Christ together in our day!

Let's look at the 'team roster' Paul listed in Colossians and see what we can learn from them.

Read Colossians 4:7-8 (ESV) ⁷ *Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord.* ⁸ *I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts,*

Tychicus was a Gentile Christian from the province of Asia Minor who had traveled with Paul on his third missionary journey. The meaning of Tychicus' name is fortunate. Paul was fortunate to have this faithful friend and fellow worker who served as his messenger. Tychicus was sent by Paul to deliver his letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians. You could say that his place on the team was to serve as a conduit. In Bible times, conduits were water courses or channels that carried water from one location to another. Tychicus was a conduit for Christ as he assisted Paul in carrying gospel information from one location to another. We can be like Tychicus and share 'information' with others concerning the good news of Christ. We might tell someone about a sermon we heard, a Bible verse that comes to mind, or intervene in prayer for a person in need.

Read Colossians 4:9 (ESV) ⁹ *and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here.*

Not all of our friends will be in the best of circumstances. One of Paul's friends was a runaway slave named Onesimus. But, Paul did not share Onesimus' private business in this public letter to the Colossian church. Instead he addressed Onesimus' runaway slave status in a private letter to the slave's owner Philemon. It is believed that Onesimus robbed Philemon and fled to Rome. There he was converted through Paul's ministry. With Paul's encouragement Onesimus returned to Philemon

accompanied by Tychicus, the messenger, who took a private letter to Paul's friend, Philemon. (Yes, that private letter is public today in the New Testament as the book of Philemon.) Paul's letter entreated Philemon to receive Onesimus back not as a slave but as a brother in Christ. If we are committed to ministering to God's people, at times we may be compelled to intercede on a friend's behalf sometimes even to another friend. Remember, we have a Friend who intercedes for us at the throne of grace.

(Romans 8:34)

Read Colossians 4:10-11 (ESV) ¹⁰ *Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him), ¹¹ and Jesus who is called Justus. These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me.*

Aristarchus was a Macedonian from Thessalonica who also traveled with Paul on his third missionary journey. Aristarchus was grabbed by an angry mob along with Paul during the riot at Ephesus. Paul referred to Aristarchus as a fellow prisoner. Tradition says that he was martyred during the reign of Nero.

Paul called Mark and Barnabas his friends. At times friends disappoint each other. That's what happened with these three, Paul, Barnabas, and Mark. Barnabas and Mark were related as either cousins or uncle and nephew. There has been some disagreement over the translation of the words for cousin and nephew - whatever the relationship Barnabas and Mark were blood relatives. Paul became impatient with Mark when he turned back on their first missionary journey. Paul was so impatient that he was not willing to give the young Mark a second chance. Barnabas was willing and it worked out so well that Mark would later write the gospel of **Mark**. From Paul's mention of Mark as a team member, we are reminded that commitment to God's people at times must include forgiveness. Possibly Paul feared that others would still want to reject Mark because of Paul and Barnabas' past dispute over him. Paul wanted to make clear to the Colossians that Mark was to be welcomed. Don't hold a lifetime grudge - let it go - keep a friend.

Jesus Justus was a friend of Paul who is mentioned in the New Testament only once. We can only speculate about the relationship between Justus and Paul. This brief mention of Justus reminds me of brief friendships that we frequently have with fellow Christians. Sometimes due to circumstances as is often the case in our own transient church fellowship, we are very close to people for a little while and then that friend is suddenly gone. Paul wrote to the Philippians, *I thank God on every remembrance of you*. When good friends must leave, don't be upset because they are leaving – instead be thankful for the time you've had together. Friends forever will meet again on heaven's shores.

Read Colossians 4:12-14 (ESV) ¹² *Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. ¹³ For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. ¹⁴ Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas.*

In Paul's letter to Philemon, he mentioned Epaphras as a fellow prisoner. Epaphras and Aristarchus (mentioned earlier) both may have been voluntary prisoners. Some believe these men took turns at voluntary imprisonment in Paul's rented house in order to be with him and minister to his needs. When you are feeling a little "put out" about what you are "doing" for your friends, remember Paul's friends who even carried friendship to the point of voluntary imprisonment to be with him.

Epaphras is also a reminder that we need to "pray for our friends." We often wrestle in prayer over our own problems. Let's be like Epaphras and struggle in prayer on behalf of our friends praying that they will stand firm in the will of God and mature.

The better part of one's life consists of his friendships.

Abraham Lincoln

Luke is the physician who wrote the gospel of *Luke*. He remained true to Paul to the end. He was Gentile not a Jew. Sometimes over the years, our friends don't turn out to be who we might have expected them to be. Paul, a Hebrew of Hebrews, in his young days would probably have never expected a Gentile doctor to be his forever friend.

Good company in a journey makes the way seem the shorter.

Izaak Walton

Luke's friendship to Paul made his life easier. That is what forever friends do for one another – help one another to make life easier.

Not everyone listed on the 'team roster' turned out to be a forever friend of Paul. Demas is an example of defection among friends. In any group of friends, there will always be at least one disappointment - for Jesus it was Judas Iscariot - for Paul it was Demas. Notice that Paul did not say anything to commend Demas to the Colossians but he did not condemn him either. We do learn from another letter that Demas disappointed Paul. **2 Timothy 4:10 (ESV)** ¹⁰ *For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica...* Don't be discouraged from making new friends just because one has let you down. Just make another friend – a friend with whom you share the love of Christ.

Did Paul mention any women friends in this group? It is possible!

Read Colossians 4:15-16 (ESV) ¹⁵ *Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.* ¹⁶ *And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea.*

Nymphas is the spelling for a man's name. Nympha is usually the feminine gender. Some manuscripts have it one way, some the other. The KJV translates the word as being a man. I personally suspect the person was a woman since the church was held at home. Several women in the Bible are listed as having churches in their houses such as Mary and Lydia. It doesn't matter, whatever the gender, this person was part of the team who shared the Word.

Paul's heart desire was that the Word of God be read aloud and studied in these churches. He wrote in **1 Timothy 4:13 (ESV)** ¹³ *Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.* The only way to copy a letter at that time was by hand. There was no email or Instant Messenger. There would not have been copies of these letters provided to each member. They were to be read aloud in church. Keep in mind that scripture reading is still a cornerstone of our worship today. When scripture is not read aloud in worship services, something is wrong. The Sunday that our church family spent the entire service reading the book of Revelation aloud was very emotional and amazing.

Then, just as now the various letters from Paul were relevant for congregations in every city. Warren Wiersbe comments, "God's Word does not have to be edited or changed to meet different problems in various situations, for it is always applicable."

What was *the letter from Laodicea*? We do not know for sure. Some scholars think that the letter to the Ephesians is this missing letter, but there is no way to know for sure. The fact that this letter has been lost does not mean we are missing a part of God's inspired Word. Some of Paul's correspondence with the church at Corinth has also been lost. God not only inspired His Word, but He providentially watched over it so that nothing would be lost that was supposed to be in that Word. Instead of wondering about what we do not have, we should be applying ourselves to what we do have!

Colossians 4:17-18 (ESV) ¹⁷ *And say to Archippus, "See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord."* ¹⁸ *I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.*

Well, there he is - one more friend - Archippus. He was a fellow minister in the gospel. Paul wanted to encourage him and remind him that his ministry was a gift from God. And that is a good reminder for each member on the Lord's ministry team. We are 'gifted' in His service. **Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)** ¹⁰ *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

Paul frequently dictated his letters and signed his name at the end. And, he always added a sentence about grace. In fact, his signature and his comment concerning God's grace became his trademark identifying that the letter was from him. He said himself in **2 Thessalonians 3:17-18 (ESV)** ¹⁷ *I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the sign of genuineness in every letter of mine; it is the way I write.* ¹⁸ *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.* I have known people in the workplace who have 'worked' to perfect their signature to the point of it being illegible and yet identifiable. Paul did not work at perfecting an illegible signature. Instead he always chose to mention the grace of God!

As we come to the end of this wonderful letter, let's remind ourselves that Jesus is enough! Jesus is all we need! When we accept Him as Savior, He is our Father and our Friend. Let's do our best to help others become friends forever in the kingdom of God!